# Phenomenalist Dogmatist Experientialism and the Distinctiveness Problem

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September 2013

**Abstract**

Phenomenalist Dogmatist Experientialism (PDE) holds the following thesis: if $S$ has a perceptual experience that $p$, then $S$ has immediate prima facie evidential justification for the belief that $p$ in virtue of the experience's phenomenology. The benefits of PDE are that it a) provides an undemanding view of perceptual justification that allows most of our ordinary perceptual beliefs to be justified, and b) accommodates two important internalist intuitions, viz. the New Evil Demon Intuition and the Blindsight Intuition. However, in the face of a specific version of the Sellarsian dilemma, PDE is ad hoc. PDE needs to explain what is so distinct about perceptual experience that enables it to fulfill its evidential role without being itself in need of justification. I argue that neither an experience's presentational phenomenology, nor its phenomenal forcefulness can be used to answer this question, and that prospects look dim for any other phenomenalist account. The subjective distinctness of perceptual experience might instead just stem from a higher-order belief that the experience is a perceptual one, but this will only serve to strengthen the case for externalism: externalism is better suited to provide an account of how we attain justified higher-order beliefs and can use this account to accommodate the Blindsight Intuition.

## 1 Introduction

Does perceptual experience evidentially justify perceptual belief, that is, do we use our experiences as evidence for our beliefs about our surroundings? Although we definitely have the intuition that perception is one of our fundamental ways of gaining knowledge, the view that experience evidentially justifies perceptual belief, call it 'experientialism', is not forced on us by this intuition. Externalist views are just as capable of accommodating it. Moreover, experientialism faces a challenge posed by Jack Lyons (2009): it must explain how perceptual experience is able to fulfill its evidential role without being itself in need of justification. This is reminiscent of Sellars' argument against foundationalism (Sellars, 1956), but instead of just repeating the dogma that only beliefs can evidentially justify beliefs, Lyons actually provides a rationale for this dogma. On his view, inferred beliefs partly derive their justification not from the premise beliefs themselves, but from whatever justified them (Lyons, 2009, pp. 74-5). Thus, what prevents experiences (as well as imaginations, desires, etc.) from playing an evidential role is not so much the fact that they are not beliefs but that they are not themselves justified. Upholders of experientialism therefore face the challenge of explaining why experiences need not be justified in order to play their evidential role.

In this paper I discuss the prospects for a specific experientialist view proposed by e.g. James Pryor (2000; 2004), Michael Huemer (2001; 2007), and Elijah Chudnoff (2011), which I call 'Phe-

nomenalist Dogmatist Experientialism' (PDE). According to this view, perceptual experiences act as evidence for belief (this makes it experientialist), having a perceptual experience with the content that $p$ is sufficient for immediate prima facie justification of the belief that $p$ (this makes it dogmatist), and the phenomenology of perceptual experience accounts for its justificatory power (this makes it phenomenalist).[1] However, in the face of Lyons' challenge, a more substantial explanation of the special status of perceptual experiences appears to be needed to defuse an objection of ad-hoc-ness. Several of these explanations, each appealing to a special phenomenal property of experience, are considered in detail. I argue that each fails to provide a plausible candidate for a phenomenal property that is specific to perceptual experience and not reducible to a higher-order belief. Moreover, it's unclear why certain phenomenal features would have any epistemic significance at all. I propose instead that the subjective distinctness of perceptual experience might just stem from an accompanying higher-order belief that the experience is perceptual. However, the existence of such a higher-order belief would not help PDE in any way, although it can be used to strengthen the case for externalism.

## 2 PDE and the Distinctiveness Problem

Let me begin by briefly presenting the several components of PDE. I have defined experientialism as the view that perceptual experience evidentially justifies perceptual belief. Evidential justifiers are justifiers that are able to serve as evidence for belief and can be contrasted with non-evidential justifiers, which only contribute to justification without serving as evidence (reliability is a well-known purported example).[2] The constraint of being able to serve as evidence makes it plausible that evidential justifiers must have propositional content, since it is difficult to see how something without propositional content could serve as evidence for a belief. Evidence must somehow make a belief probable, or the belief should be inferable from the evidence, and these relations only seem to make sense if the justifier itself has propositional content.[3] Anyway, the assumption that evidential justifiers have propositional content will not be a problem here, since I only discuss a version of experientialism which accepts that experiences have propositional content.

Dogmatism is the view that having a perceptual experience that $p$ is sufficient for immediate prima facie justification of the belief that $p$. In other words, "if it perceptually seems to you that $p$, then you thereby possess some prima facie justification for believing that $p$" (Chudnoff, 2011, p. 314).[4] Both the *immediacy* and *defeasibility* of justification are important aspects of the view.

Starting with the former notion, according to dogmatism, perceptual justification is immediate in the sense that it "doesn't rest on any other evidence or justification you have for believing other propositions" (Pryor, 2000, p. 532). The thought is that perceptual experience can provide justification for the belief that you have two hands even if you do not have any prior justification for the belief that you are not a brain in a vat.

[1] Note that Huemer and Chudnoff also allow other seemings (e.g. memorial, intuitive) besides perceptual experiences to play this role.

[2] See (Lyons, 2008) for more on the distinction.

[3] Note that Earl Conee and Richard Feldman (2004) think otherwise: they think it is overly restrictive to exclude experiences and feelings of confidence from acting as evidence even if they do not have propositional content. As it is not necessary to think of experience as evidentially justifying perceptual belief, I believe the burden of proof is on them to show that non-propositional evidential justification makes sense. Moreover, feelings of confidence might be able to act as evidence only because they are reducible to higher-order beliefs (see section 3 for related considerations).

[4] Note that I do not present the dogmatist thesis as "*necessarily*, if it perceptually seems to you that $p$, then you thereby possess some prima facie justification for believing that $p$". Although some dogmatists explicitly subscribe to this latter thesis (e.g., Tucker, 2010), the necessity claim is left out in the original formulation of the thesis by Pryor (2000).

Going on to the latter notion, dogmatism also holds that perceptual justification can be defeated by additional evidence. This is captured by its claim that perceptual justification is prima facie: if you have strong evidence against $p$, or if a reliable source tells you that you are currently experiencing a visual illusion, then even though your perceptual experience that $p$ provides you with prima facie justification for the belief that $p$, your belief that $p$ will still not be ultima facie justified.

The dogmatist thesis is compatible with several views about what it is about perceptual experience in virtue of which the thesis is true.[5] For instance, a reliabilist dogmatist could hold that the dogmatist thesis is (contingently) true because the process from perceptual experience to perceptual belief happens to be reliable. In contrast, a *phenomenalist* dogmatist holds that the thesis is true because of the intrinsic phenomenal properties of perceptual experience.

Even if one combines dogmatism with experientialism, thereby holding that perceptual experience provides immediate prima facie *evidential* justification for belief, then one could still be a reliabilist. For instance, one could hold that perceptual experiences constitute the evidence on which subjects base their perceptual beliefs, and that these beliefs are justified because the evidence is reliably connected to the truth of the beliefs.[6] However, my target here is the phenomenalist version of dogmatist experientialism, the view that perceptual experience provides immediate prima facie evidential justification for belief in virtue of the experience's phenomenology.

Are phenomenal dogmatists like Pryor, Huemer and Chudnoff really committed to experientialism? Pryor explicitly states that "[...] it would be misleading to call these experiences your "evidence" for believing $p$" (2000, p. 519). However, Pryor just wants to convey here that a subject does not himself reason from the premise "it seems to me that $p$" to the conclusion "$p$". A subject need not have any beliefs about the relation between an experience and the perceptual belief it justifies, even though it is necessary that there is a specific relation between the two: they need to have the same content. That the experience still works as an evidential justifier is suggested by the following comparison Pryor makes:

> Compare: when you have a justified belief that $p$ & $q$, you are thereby also justified in believing $p$. But this justification for believing $p$ does not rest on any awareness you may have of the fact that you have a justified belief that $p$ & $q$. You do not need to be able to appeal to the fact that you have a justified belief that $p$ & $q$ as a premise. The mere having of a justified belief that $p$ & $q$ is enough for your justification for believing $p$ to be in place (2000, p. 519).

Just as you do not need to reason from the premise "it seems to me that $p$" to the conclusion "$p$", you also do not need to reason from the premise "I justifiably belief that $p$ & $q$" to the conclusion "$p$". All you need for justification of your belief that $p$ is to have the experience that $p$, or to have the justified belief that $p$ & $q$. But the latter case of justification presumably has to do with the fact that $p$ is deducible from the proposition that $p$ & $q$, which is a sure sign of evidential justification.

Moreover, the relation between perceptual experience and belief is supposed to be rational, not merely causal. Having a perceptual experience with the content that $p$ is supposed to make it rational for the subject to believe that $p$, and that is why the subject has prima facie justification for the belief that $p$. This comes out more clearly when one considers the notion of well-foundedness, or doxastic justification, instead of the notion of propositional justification that we have been working with. Suppose that a subject has the perceptual experience that there

[5] Thanks to an anonymous referee for pointing this out.

[6] See (Comesaña, 2010) for a version of evidentialist reliabilism that might be compatible with dogmatism.

is a tomato in front of him. In virtue of having this experience, the subject now has propositional justification for the belief that there is a tomato in front of him. However, if the subject believes that there is a tomato in front of him merely because he experienced something red, then his belief will not be well-founded despite being propositionally justified. The problem is that the subject did not *base* his belief on the *evidence* that made it rational to hold it, i.e., his experience that there was a *tomato* in front of him.

So I think it's fair to say that PDE is the position that has been defended by philosophers like Pryor, Huemer and Chudnoff. And for good reasons too. In contrast with theories that require perceptual beliefs to be evidentially justified by other beliefs (about the reliability of one's own perceptual processes for instance), PDE merely requires that experience itself evidentially justifies perceptual belief. Together with a liberal view about the content of experience (which holds that experiences can represent kind properties like *being a table*, or *being a snake*), this makes it easy to explain how we are justified in all of our ordinary perceptual beliefs. Moreover, this justification might even be available to animals and children, as long as they are somehow capable of basing their beliefs on their experiences in the right way.[7]

The phenomenalist aspect of PDE further makes it into a full-fledged internalist view about justification, in the sense that we have access to those factors in virtue of which we have justification for our perceptual beliefs, viz. our perceptual experiences. This provides it, in contrast with reliabilist versions of dogmatist experientialism, with the means to accommodate two important internalist intuitions. The first intuition is that justification remains the same as long as the experiences remain the same — even if they are misleadingly induced by an evil demon as in Lehrer and Cohen's (1983) New Evil Demon Scenario (call this the 'New Evil Demon Intuition'). The second intuition is that perception cannot grant us any direct justification in the absence of experience (call this the 'Blindsight Intuition').[8] Thus, patients with blindsight, who do not experience anything in a certain region of their visual field, do not have any direct justification about what goes on in their blind spot even if they are able to guess correctly.[9] As PDE is able to accommodate both intuitions, and does not fall prey to an obvious over-intellectualization objection, it certainly appears to be a strong contender for an adequate account of perceptual justification.

However, there is also some reason to be suspect of PDE. What we wanted was a theory that could explain how experience is able to evidentially justify our perceptual beliefs, and PDE is a theory which just claims that experiences *can* evidentially justify perceptual beliefs – albeit defeasibly. Now this might not be a problem if there were no reasons to doubt that there is such an evidential relation between perceptual experience and perceptual belief, but, unfortunately, those reasons do exist. Take an obvious case of evidential justification, where the belief that $p$, together with the belief that if $p$ then $q$, justifies the conclusion that $q$. The conclusion will only be justified if the premise beliefs themselves are both justified. This shows that some states with propositional content can only evidentially justify beliefs if they are themselves justified. On the other hand, there are also states with propositional content that are not able to evidentially justify any beliefs, such as imaginations and desires. If I simply imagine that $p$, or just desire that

[7]This last condition might actually be problematic. For instance, Huemer says the following about the basing relation: "when one apprehension, B, is based on another, A, A causes B because A (apparently) logically supports B" (2001, p. 56). This suggests that a subject needs to recognize, or think he recognizes, that an experience supports a certain belief for his belief to be based on that experience. And this seems too demanding for unsophisticated agents.

[8]A reliabilist dogmatist *experientialism* would also be able to accommodate this intuition due to the lack of evidence on the part of the subject. But that view is closed off from the specific reply to the New Evil Demon Intuition that I sketch in the final section.

[9]Note that this does not deny that blindsighters may have indirect justification by inference from what is happening around the blind spot.

$p$, this does not give me any evidential justification for believing that $p$. Lyons (2009, pp. 74-5), taking into account the obvious case of evidential justification, explains this fact by claiming that all evidentially justified beliefs derive their justification from whatever justified the evidence in the first place. This means that all evidential justifiers must themselves be justified before they can confer any justification. Since only beliefs appear to be states with propositional content that are capable of being justified, Lyons concludes that only beliefs can evidentially justify other beliefs.

Even if one does not agree with Lyons' conclusion, this does amount to a challenge for PDE. The latter theory has to give an alternative account of the difference between belief, experience, desire, and imagination that explains why the first two are possible evidential justifiers, while the latter two are not.[10] Moreover, it has to give an account of what is so special about experience as an evidential justifier that enables it to provide prima facie justification without being itself justified.[11] Call this the *distinctiveness problem* for PDE. Without an answer to this problem, PDE would remain an ad hoc view of perceptual justification.

# 3 Supposed Epistemically Significant Phenomenologies

## 3.1 A feeling of seeming to ascertain that p

Most proponents of PDE provide at least some suggestion as to what it is about perceptual experience that gives it the power to provide evidential justification without being in need of justification itself. Pryor gives the following answer to the distinctiveness problem:

> I think there's a distinctive phenomenology: the feeling of *seeming to ascertain* that a given proposition is true. This is present when the way a mental episode represents its content makes it feel as though, *by* enjoying that episode, you can *thereby just tell* that that content obtains. [...] When you daydream or exercise your visual imagination, you represent propositions [...], but it does not feel as though you can thereby just tell that those propositions are true (Pryor, 2004, p. 357).

One problem with Pryor's suggestion is that it's not clear whether the feeling of seeming to ascertain that a given proposition is true necessarily has to do with the way a mental episode, like perception, represents its content. Couldn't the feeling arise because of a separate belief about the mental episode? One candidate for such a belief would be the belief that the mental episode is veridical: if someone believes that he is veridically perceiving that $p$ (even if he is, say, imagining that $p$), then it's no wonder that he also has a feeling of seeming to ascertain that $p$ is true.

However, this specific suggestion seems to fall prey to the phenomenon of known illusion.[12] Even if a subject is well aware, say, that the two lines in the Müller-Lyer illusion are actually of the same length, the two lines continue to look to be of a different length. The feeling of seeming to ascertain that the lines are of a different length does not go away even though the subject no longer believes that he is veridically perceiving that they are of a different length. So it's implausible that the feeling of seeming to ascertain that $p$ can be explained by an appeal to the belief that one is veridically perceiving that $p$.

[10] Maybe imagination is a possible evidential justifier in cases where one imagines that something is the case to 'see' what would happen. However, the cases I'm concerned with are ones in which one simply imagines that $p$.

[11] Notice that this latter question is not adequately dealt with by claiming that experiences provide *non-inferential* justification, as this does little more than giving a name to the unexplained phenomenon.

[12] Thanks to an anonymous referee for pushing me to include this problem to clarify my own proposal.

Two responses are in order with regard to this objection. First, the fact that a certain higher-order belief is not *necessary* for the feeling of seeming to ascertain that $p$ does not show that it is not *sufficient* for the feeling of seeming to ascertain that $p$. And the sufficiency claim already constitutes a problem for Pryor's proposal. If a higher-order belief that one veridically perceives that $p$ can give rise to the phenomenology that supposedly explains why a subject has justification for the belief that $p$, then there could be situations in which a subject is justified merely because he has the relevant higher-order belief.[13] The higher-order belief that one veridically perceives that $p$ might be false, or worse, unjustified, but the subject would still be justified because he would have an experience that $p$ in combination with the relevant phenomenology. Not only is this prima facie a bad result, it also puts pressure on PDE's claim that perceptual justification is *immediate* in the case where one does have justification for the higher-order belief.

Second, one could appeal to different beliefs to explain where the feeling of seeming to ascertain that $p$ comes from. For instance, the belief that one currently *perceptually experiences* that $p$, where this should be distinguished from the belief that one currently imagines (or desires, etc.) that $p$, does not fall prey to the phenomenon of known illusion. Of course I am not suggesting that subjects would actually consciously entertain precisely that belief, but later on (section 4) I will try to make plausible that something like this might be going on unconsciously nonetheless.

### 3.2 Presentational phenomenology

Chudnoff (2011, p. 317) agrees that Pryor's account of the special phenomenology of perceptual experience is somewhat too underdeveloped to work. Chudnoff explicates Pryor's suggestion by appealing to an experience's *presentational phenomenology*, claiming that an experience has presentational phenomenology with respect to a proposition $p$ "just in case they are experiences in which we both represent that $p$ [...] and seem to be aware of an item that makes it the case that $p$" (Chudnoff, 2011, p. 321). According to Chudnoff, it is an experience's presentational phenomenology that accounts for its justificatory force:

> I find it compelling that if you have an experience that not only represents your environment as being a certain way, but that is one in which you also seem to be aware of the very items in your environment in virtue of which it is the case that your environment is that way, then you thereby have some prima facie justification for believing that your environment is the way it appears to you to be (Chudnoff, 2011, p. 322).

The problem with this specific proposal is that it might not provide a satisfying answer to the distinctiveness problem because it fails to distinguish clearly between imagination and perception. This becomes prominent when one looks at the specific ways in which Chudnoff fills out presentational phenomenology for both perception and *intuition*. For the case of perception, Chudnoff thinks that presentational phenomenology comes down to a combination of "seeming to fact-perceive that [$p$]" (2011, p. 319) and "seeming to be sensorily item-aware of an item [that makes it the case that $p$]" (ibid.). Similarly, "an intuition experience possesses presentational phenomenology when in it you both seem to fact-*intuit* that $p$ and seem to be *intellectually* item-aware of an item that makes it the case that $p$" (Chudnoff, 2011, p. 323). Then why not claim that a visualization has presentational phenomenology when in it you both seem to fact-*visualize* that $p$ and seem to be *imaginatorily* item-aware of an item that makes it the case that $p$?

[13] Note that this does not deny Pryor's claim that it's not enough for prima facie justification to think you have the phenomenology (Pryor, 2004, p. 357). I'm envisaging a situation in which a higher-order belief actually gives rise to the necessary phenomenology.

Although Chudnoff agrees that imagination can also have a sort of presentational phenomenology, he thinks that there is still an important difference between imagination and, e.g., perception:

> Unlike sensory, intellectual, or self-presentational awareness, objectual imagining is not a kind of awareness, or seeming awareness. That is, objectually imagining an $F$ is not a way to seem to be aware of an $F$. On the face of it, if you seem to be aware of a tiger, for example, you represent the tiger as actual — it is really there. But you can objectually imagine a tiger without representing the tiger as actual (Chudnoff, 2012, p. 62).

The important difference that Chudnoff here points to has to do with representing something as actual. But it is still not clear whether this can definitively distinguish imagination from perception. Although I agree with Chudnoff's point that you *can* objectually imagine a tiger without representing the tiger as actual, it seems to me that you can also objectually imagine a tiger *and* represent it as actual (e.g., by imagining that there actually is a tiger in front of you at this moment). But surely this imaginatory experience would then still not provide any prima facie justification for the belief that there is a tiger in front of you. So presentational phenomenology cannot be sufficient for the justificatory force of perceptual experience, given that there are experiences with presentational phenomenology that do not provide evidential justification.

### 3.3 Forcefulness

The last suggestion, that perception represents things as actual, brings us to a distinctive phenomenal property of perceptual experience suggested by Huemer (2001, p. 77): its *forcefulness*.[14] According to Huemer, perceptual experience not only has a certain representational content, it also presents this content in a certain way, namely *as being actualized*. Huemer thus makes clear that the representational content in its entirety is presented as actualized by perception, in contrast with (what seemed to be) Chudnoff's suggestion that *an object* is represented as actual in the content itself. This means that the previous counterexample of imagining that there actually is a tiger in front of you can no longer be used: although in this example the tiger is represented as actual, the entire content might still not be presented as actualized.

Huemer explains what he means by forcefulness in more detail by contrasting it with what it is not:

> It is not a matter of how faint or vivid an experience is, and it is not a matter of how detailed and specific its content is. Forcefulness is not a matter of either the qualia or the representational content of an experience; it is a third aspect of experience. As to what that aspect is, I have no more to say than [the following]: it is the fact that, in the experience, it seems to one that something satisfying the content of the experience actually exists, here and now (Huemer, 2001, p. 79).

As with Pryor's suggestion, we can reasonably ask whether the property of forcefulness is *necessarily* connected to perceptual experience. Huemer suggests that it is when he claims that, because of the forcefulness of perceptual experience, "[...] you would [...] *never* confuse seeing a tomato with imagining one" (2001, p. 77; my italics). This is a very strong claim, as it surely seems possible that a subject somehow confuses seeing a tomato with imagining one. Moreover, that this possibility is also actual could be supported by appealing to the so-called 'Perky effect'.

[14] Chris Tucker (2010, p. 530) mentions a similar property of 'assertiveness', and William Tolhurst (1998, pp. 300-1) talks of the property of 'presence'.

Perky (1910) designed a set-up in which subjects were told to imagine a certain object, like a banana, book, or leaf, on a surface while a faint image which resembled that object was also projected (with increasing luminosity) onto the surface. Subjects did not know that an image was going to be projected, and also denied to have seen a projected image – they claimed they just imagined everything on the surface. Yet their reports made clear that the projected image did influence their experience: some noted that the banana was standing on end, which was not as they had been supposing they thought of it; some were surprised to imagine an elm leaf even though they had tried for a maple leaf (Perky, 1910, p. 432). The precise interpretation of these findings remains controversial: subjects might have somehow mistaken their perceptual experiences (of the objects) for imaginations (of those objects), but the imagination could also have blocked the occurrence of a perceptual experience altogether (Segal and Gordon, 1969). The former interpretation is clearly at odds with Huemer's claim that you would never confuse perception for imagination, and this would leave him without an explanation of how this is possible.

However, the latter interpretation, that imagination interfered to such an extent that no perceptual experience actually occurred, appears to be the usual one in current psychological literature.[15] Even if this is granted, then it is still surprising that a philosophical theory is a priori committed to a specific interpretation of the data. Moreover, the precise way in which imagination is supposed to interfere with perception remains unresolved (Reeves and Craver-Lemley, 2012). Although there might not be a perceptual experience that is confused for an imaginatory experience, there might still be some confusion going on at the level of pre-phenomenal processing.[16]

Something similar could be said about confusing imaginations with perceptions. Some have claimed that hallucinations might just be internal mental events, like imaginations, that are mistaken for genuine perceptions because of a diminished skill in 'reality discrimination' (Johnson et al, 1993; Fish, 2008). Again the idea does not seem to be that subjects consciously assess their experience and wrongly judge them to be either perception or imagination, but that there is some unconscious mechanism that somehow flags them as the one or the other. I will say a bit more about this in section 4.

It is difficult to assess the precise philosophical force of these empirical hypotheses, but a few things are clear. First, subjects in the Perky experiment lack forceful experiences, while hallucinating subjects have forceful experiences. Huemer would probably accept these consequences as well, concluding that hallucinating subjects have justification for their beliefs (which Huemer explicitly endorses and takes to be a virtue of his theory (2001, p. 129)), while subjects in the Perky experiment lack such justification. Second, the presence or absence of forcefulness in these examples should not be reducible to a higher-order belief on the part of the subject with the content that, e.g., the current experience is perceptual. If it were reducible to such a higher-order belief, then PDE couldn't gain any epistemic mileage out of it: this belief would have to be justified itself before it could confer any evidential justification, and even if it was justified it would conflict with the supposed *immediacy* of perceptual justification.

Huemer would certainly agree with this second point, as he holds that forcefulness is a specific type of seeming (i.e. a seeming that something satisfying the content of the experience actually exists) and that in general "its seeming to $S$ as if $P$ is a distinct state from $S$'s believing that $P$" (Huemer, 2001, p. 99). As it appears implausible to posit a non-belief-like intellectual

[15] Although this is not so easy to determine, as the 'Perky effect' nowadays refers in psychology to the general interference of imagination on perception. Although it is implausible to explain this *general* effect by appealing to confusion of perception with imagination, in a specific instance (viz., the 1910 Perky experiment) this confusion might still take place.

[16] Cf.Reeves and Craver-Lemley (2012, p. 7): "An [attractive] alternative hypothesis is that the Perky effect results from a combination of real and imagined features that makes the real features more difficult to extract."

seeming that something satisfying the content of experience actually exists in addition to the perceptual seeming (the perceptual experience) that such-and-so is the case, the best way to interpret Huemer is to take him as suggesting that there is a phenomenal property of experience, not reducible to the content of the experience, which conveys that external objects are actually present. But the problem is that we have been given no explanation at all how this irreducible phenomenal property of experience (dis)appears in the empirical cases under discussion. So even in the best scenario, PDE is left with an explanatory challenge.

This is especially pressing because one can give an ontologically simpler explanation of the relevant phenomena (I elaborate on this explanation in section 4). In the Perky experiments, subjects do not have any forceful experiences, because they (perhaps unconsciously) believe that they are imagining instead of perceiving. In the case of hallucination, subjects believe that they are perceiving whatever it is that they might instead be imagining, and therefore have forceful experiences. This is an explanation that appeals to higher-order beliefs, instead of supposing the presence or absence of an extra irreducible phenomenal property to the content of experience. And if forcefulness indeed comes down to having certain higher-order beliefs, then it is of no help to PDE.

### 3.4 General worries about the phenomenalist approach

From the specific discussions of the several phenomenalist answers to the distinctiveness problem we can distill a general recipe that phenomenalists have to follow to come up with a satisfying reply. First, the phenomenalist has to clearly describe a phenomenal feature that is specific to perceptual experience. No other propositional states incapable of evidential justification (e.g., desires, imaginations), or incapable of evidential justification without being themselves justified (beliefs), should have this feature, or else one has not explained where the distinctive justificatory power of perceptual experience comes from. This first step is hard enough already, as, for instance, presentational phenomenology does not entirely seem to fit the bill.[17]

One way in which the first step might be avoided is by claiming that *any* mental state, whether it is a belief, imagination, or perceptual experience, has justificatory power so long as it has a specific phenomenal feature.[18] But this strategy leads to a view that is very different from the original PDE: instead of holding that if it perceptually seems to you that $p$, you are immediately prima facie justified in your belief that $p$, the view now holds that if you are in a mental state which has property $F$ and content $p$, then you are prima facie justified in your belief that $p$. This lacks PDE's original intuitiveness, and will still need to deal with the following two steps to answer the distinctiveness problem.

For the second step, the phenomenalist has to show that his preferred phenomenal feature is not reducible to a (higher-order) belief, *and* that (higher-order) beliefs are not causally sufficient for the phenomenal feature. If the feature is reducible to a belief of some sort, then this belief will either be itself unjustified and therefore unable to evidentially justify the perceptual belief, or justified, but then the justification of perceptual beliefs is no longer immediate. If certain beliefs are causally sufficient for the phenomenal feature, then perceptual justification would be attainable if one merely had the means of inducing these beliefs — which seems to make perceptual justification too easy to obtain, given that the causally sufficient beliefs can be completely unjustified.

[17] One reviewer pointed out that I have not considered the possibility that there might be experiences that have the phenomenal feature normally sufficient for justificatory power (F), but that also have another feature (G) which blocks F's making the state into a justifier. Although I acknowledge that I have not ruled out this possibility, I think it is up to the defender of PDE of working out its details to make it into a plausible theory.

[18] An anonymous referee provided this suggestion.

Even if these first two steps are completed, the phenomenalist is not home free yet. Take whatever phenomenal feature you like, be it a feeling of seeming to ascertain that $p$, or presentational phenomenology, or forcefulness, the phenomenalist will still have to show that this feature is also *epistemically* significant. After all, the distinctiveness problem does not just ask for any specific feature that distinguishes perceptual experience from states like beliefs, desires, and imaginations. What is needed to answer the problem is a feature that is both specific to perceptual experience *and* epistemically significant. And this remains problematic. Even it phenomenally seems to you that you are aware of all the items that make the currently perceptually represented proposition true, why should this provide you with justification for believing that proposition? How could phenomenology somehow add justificatory strength to the represented propositions? Here the proponent of PDE might claim that explanations have to stop somewhere and that the envisaged justificatory relation between contentful phenomenal experience and perceptual belief is primitive. However, in the face of relevant externalist alternatives, such a reply might not do the trick. The externalist *can* supply an explanation of why, for instance, the reliability of a belief-forming process is important for justification. Reliability is important because it makes sure that justified beliefs have some connection to *being true*, and that is an important epistemic value. Such a further explanation of the epistemic relevance of phenomenology will also be important to provide if one wants to defend the view that the phenomenology of experience provides it with a distinctive justificatory power, and this remains a third hurdle to be taken by the proponents of PDE.

# 4 Distinguishing Perception from Imagination

The above discussion about distinctive properties of perceptual experience does raise the following two questions: if there is no irreducible phenomenal property specific to perceptual experience, then, first, what is it that normally distinguishes perception from imagination, and, second, how do we distinguish them? Huemer mentions that Hume took the distinctness of perception and imagination to lie in their respective vivacity: he thought perception to be far more vivid than imagination. Huemer himself disagrees with this idea: "an exercise of imagination is distinguished from a perceptual experience chiefly by the fact that the object of the latter seems to the subject to be present then and there, while the object of the former does not seem to exist at all" (2001, p. 78). Huemer further argues against Hume's theory by saying that someone looking at a faint photograph of a tomato will never have any temptation to think that he were merely imagining the photograph. Similarly, Huemer claims that even if you have a vivid, detailed imagination, or very poor eyesight, you would never confuse imagination and perception (2001, p. 77). Now I have already questioned the truth of this second claim, but here I want to focus on something else. Huemer seems committed not only to the claim that there is an irreducible phenomenal property of forcefulness that distinguishes perception from imagination, but also to the claim that subjects themselves distinguish their experiences on the basis of their phenomenology. That is why he emphasizes that subjects would not confuse perception with imagination on the basis of an absence of vivacity or detailedness. However, the suggestion that we identify an experience as an imagination on the basis of its phenomenology actually appears somewhat absurd.[19] It is not normally the case that we first have to examine our own experience before we know it to be an imagination or a perception. We do not use our experience as evidence for the conclusion that we are undergoing an imagination. Similarly, we do not have to examine our imagination to find out what we are imagining. We normally know that we are imagining, and what we are

[19] At the end of the day, this is an empirical question, but I contend that it is not even phenomenologically apt to claim that we usually identify experiences on the basis of their phenomenology.

imagining, without relying on the phenomenology of the imagination itself. Instead of thinking that imagination lacks a certain phenomenal property, on the basis of which objects do not phenomenally seem to exist, I suggest that the correct view is that we normally know that we are imagining, and on that basis *believe* that the objects are not really present.

A similar story goes for perception. It certainly seems to be the case that we normally know that we are perceiving when we are perceiving, without relying on our perceptual experience as evidence for this knowledge — although one of course could *try* to do this in certain scenarios (e.g. when confronted by a skeptic). But if it is correct that we normally know that we are perceiving and imagining without relying on the perception or imagination itself, then how do we know this; what justifies this knowledge?

Here we must leave the internalist framework of PDE that we have so far been going along with, and instead commit to an externalist framework. I mentioned already the hypothesis that imaginations might be mistaken for perceptions because of a diminished cognitive capacity for reality discrimination. We normally keep tabs on the source of our information, e.g. whether the source was internal or external, whether it was seen or heard, on the basis of the content and context of the information (Johnson et al, 1993).[20] This activity often happens unconsciously, although it might become conscious in some cases. Now, if something like this monitoring process already happens during perception and imagination, this would explain how we come to believe that we are perceiving or imagining when we are doing so. Our belief that we are perceiving, or that we are imagining, would then be the output of an unconscious process of information monitoring. An internalist would be hard put to explain how such a belief could be justified, given the unconscious nature of the process leading to it. Although one could try to cash this out in terms of evidence leading to belief, there is no reason to assume that all this "evidence" is accessible for the subject. And this is what internalism, or at least an access internalism like PDE, requires for justification. Externalism, on the other hand, has no problem in accounting for the justification of the higher-order beliefs in question: they are the output of a reliable cognitive mechanism, and that is sufficient for their justification.

The picture I am suggesting is as follows. We do not distinguish perception from imagination by using the phenomenology of these experiences as evidence, but instead know the experiences for what they are by means of a reliable cognitive mechanism. Thus, it is ill-suited to look for a special phenomenal feature of perception on the basis of which I know it to be perception: there is no such phenomenal feature. The phenomenal distinctiveness of perception and imagination might just stem from having the respective experiences in combination with having higher-order beliefs about their nature.

Wouldn't such a proposal fall prey to the phenomenon of known illusion? The phenomenology of some illusions (like the Müller-Lyer illusion) is the same even if one does not believe in the veridicality of one's own experiences. However, I am not suggesting that the subjective distinctness of perceptual experience should be explained by a higher-order belief that one is currently veridically perceiving that such-and-so is the case. Instead, the relevant higher-order belief is that one is currently perceiving, in the sense of gaining information from a certain outside source instead of from an inside source. *This* belief can be present even if one does not believe that the current perceptual experience is veridical.[21]

[20] There is some evidence that this source-monitoring mechanism is not as reliable in at least some cases of actual hallucinators, such as schizophrenics and Parkinson's patients (Barnes et al, 2003; Simons et al, 2006).

[21] The phenomenon of known hallucination might be more difficult to deal with, although it's not obvious that hallucinatory subjects do not believe that they are perceiving in the relevant sense if they know that they are hallucinating.

# 5 Internalist Intuitions Revisited

Let's suppose it to be correct that we normally have higher-order knowledge of our own experiences by means of some sort of reliable cognitive mechanism. This brings with it one way for externalists to respond to the earlier mentioned Blindsight Intuition. On the PDE account, blindsighters are epistemically worse off than regular perceivers because they do not experience what goes on in their blind spot, even if they are able to guess reliably and correctly. According to PDE, blindsighters are not directly justified in their guesses because they lack experiential evidence. In contrast, the standard (non-experientialist) externalist framework seems to have a problem in accommodating the idea that blindsighters do not have direct justification for their guesses. Note that blindsighters do not actually believe their own guesses (they think they are randomly guessing), but let's assume a scenario in which blindsighters trust their guesses and believe their content even though they do not know whether they are actually reliable.[22]

If it is true that we normally have higher-order knowledge of the fact that we are perceiving, then blindsighters are in this respect epistemically worse off than regular perceivers, even on an externalist perspective. Blindsighters do not know that they are gaining the information which supports their guesses through the use of their eyes. This already goes some way towards accommodating the Blindsight Intuition, as it explains why perceivers who enjoy experiences are epistemically better off than blindsighters. Normal sighters know that they are *seeing* such-and-so, in contrast with blindsighers, who are ignorant of the source of their reliable guesses. But this epistemic difference does not yet explain why blindsighters' guesses would not be justified at all.

There are at least two ways to get at this result from a standard externalist perspective, which both posit a *defeater* for the justification arising out of the reliable unconscious perceptual process.[23] The first option is to posit a belief that one was not perceiving that $p$ (where $p$ is a proposition about something going on in the blind spot), which would then cast doubt on the truth and justification of $p$. If one feels that this belief is not sufficient to constitute a defeater, then one might also posit, as a variation on this first option, the belief that one did not know the source of the guess that $p$, or the belief that the belief that $p$ was unreliably formed. Whichever the precise details, the idea is that the posited beliefs should conflict with what a subject himself believes to be required to have a justified belief.

The second option is to just use the *lack* of a higher-order belief about e.g., the source of the guess that $p$, as a defeater for justification that $p$. Although this second option is clearly less cognitively demanding, thus making sure that defeat is not too hard to come by for blindsighters, it also has the drawback of making defeat too easy to come by. Just think of cognitively unsophisticated agents that are unable to form any higher-order beliefs. For them, all perceptual justification would be defeated according to the second option. This makes the first option the preferable one. Having the relevant defeating higher-order belief appears demanding enough to ensure that perceptual justification is not always defeated for unsophisticated agents, but still easy enough to make sure that the justification is defeated for the more sophisticated blindsighters.

This proposal does have some surprising consequences for the case of *unsophisticated blindsighters*. As unsophisticated blindsighters do not have any higher-order beliefs, the proposal would have the consequence that their first-order perceptual beliefs *are* justified, despite the lack

[22]This would make the blindsighters very much like BonJour's (1985) clairvoyant Norman. The difference is that blindsighters would surely be justified if they still enjoyed the relevant perceptual experiences, although it is not so clear that Norman would be justified if he also enjoyed specific clairvoyant experiences.

[23]I am now outlining two ways that connect to my ideas about higher-order beliefs about perception. One could also use a different way to respond to the Blindsight Intuition by using externalist responses to clairvoyance objections (see, e.g., Goldman, 1986; Bergmann, 2006; Lyons, 2009).

of perceptual experience. This might not be such a bad result though. After all, why couldn't there be creatures that gain perceptual knowledge without having any experiences? The Blindsight Intuition seems to be specifically about *human* perceivers, and with the account here we can explain why: in the absence of experience *we* acquire defeaters for perceptual beliefs.

Let me make my proposal on behalf of externalism more clear. The thought is that higher-order beliefs can defeat first-order beliefs by making them appear unjustified. These higher-order beliefs need not be justified themselves to become defeaters. Indeed, in the blindsight scenario the generated higher-order beliefs about the source of one's beliefs might be more often false than true with regard to a specific domain of beliefs (namely, beliefs about the source of the beliefs that have to do with what goes on in the blind spot). This would make the cognitive mechanism responsible for these higher-order beliefs unreliable with regard to this specific domain of beliefs, and the higher-order beliefs themselves thereby (perhaps) unjustified.[24]

However, it's not the case that unjustified higher-order beliefs can also *confer* justification on first-order beliefs. A blindsighter does not gain justification for his perceptual beliefs by randomly adopting the higher-order belief that he is reliably perceiving such-and-so. On the account I'm proposing then, there is a crucial difference between higher-order beliefs that act as defeaters and higher-order beliefs that act as justifications: the former need not be justified, but the latter do.[25] This different treatment of defeating beliefs and justifying beliefs is not ad hoc, as it also fits Lyons' account of evidential justification. If we accept the plausible idea that evidential justification can only take place if the evidential justifier itself has justification to transmit, then this still leaves completely open what to say about defeat.

Even in the face of this explanation of the Blindsight Intuition, internalists might dig in their heels and maintain that blindsighters lack evidence which normal perceivers do have, namely certain qualitative experiences. But notice that it is not at all clear that our experiences really serve as evidence for our beliefs. The Blindsight Intuition does not really amount to that. Moreover, the contention that we use experience as evidence for perceptual belief in fact appears to be phenomenologically inadequate. This does not just come down to the claim that we do not consciously reason from "it seems to me that $p$" to "$p$" (recall that Pryor explicitly agrees with this). It comes down to the phenomenological fact that we are not normally aware of two different mental events, one of experience, and one of belief based on that experience. Normally, seeing just is believing. We only become aware of a difference between experience and belief when we are aware of some sort of defeater, e.g., when we are familiar with the illusory nature of a certain experience as in the case of the Müller-Lyer illusion. This is no knock-down argument against the thesis that we do use experience as evidence for belief, but it does show that this is a substantive philosophical thesis instead of a part of common sense.

Realizing that experience need not act as our evidence for belief might also help in rebutting the New Evil Demon Intuition. To do full justice to this problem I would need a much longer discussion, so here I will only point to the connection I have in mind.[26] If we think of experience as our evidence for belief, then it is natural to think that the agents in the New Evil Demon Scenario have the same evidence, and, therefore, the same justification as we do.[27] But once we accept that experience is just a contingent, non-evidential factor in our way of attaining perceptual knowledge, then this intuition might subside. In any case it is not so clear whether

[24]This would depend on whether one holds that justification requires reliability of a process with regard to a specific domain of beliefs.

[25]See also (Bergmann, 2005) for such a theory.

[26]Again, there are also other externalist replies to the New Evil Demon problem (see, e.g., Goldman, 1986, 1988; Comesaña, 2002; Majors and Sawyer, 2005).

[27]Although natural, one could also deny even this and hold that the agent in the New Evil Demon scenario merely thinks that he has the same evidence. This seems to require some form of metaphysical disjunctivism about perceptual experience (Haddock and Macpherson, 2008).

the New Evil Demon Intuition supports the thesis that perceptual experience acts as evidence for belief, or instead follows from a prior commitment to this thesis.

# 6 Conclusion

Although PDE is an undemanding internalist view of perceptual justification that is capable of accommodating both the Blindsight and New Evil Demon Intuition, the distinctiveness problem presents it with a severe explanatory challenge. To overcome an objection of ad-hoc-ness proponents of PDE have to find a phenomenal property of experience that is specific to perception, irreducible to (higher-order) beliefs, and epistemically significant. I have argued that current proposals do not meet this challenge and that the search for such a property might be misguided, especially if one assumes that it forms the basis for our discriminations between perceptual and imaginatory experiences. Instead, I have proposed that we know that we are perceiving when we are perceiving on the basis of a source-monitoring mechanism, and that an externalist framework is best suited to accommodate this knowledge. Moreover, allowing for higher-order beliefs also helps externalism to give an alternative account of the Blindsight Intuition: blindsighters lack justification not because they lack experiential evidence, but because they have higher-order beliefs that defeat it.

# Acknowledgements

Thanks to Christoph Kelp, Jan Heylen, and three anonymous referees for helpful comments and suggestions.

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